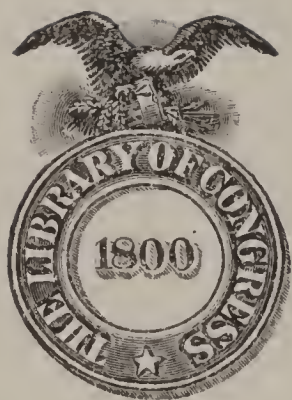


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A CANDLE
OF COMFORT



CHARLES NELSON PAGE



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A Candle of Comfort

By
CHARLES NELSON PACE

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“Lead, kindly Light, amid th’ encircling gloom. . .”



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TO MY FATHER
JAMES W. PACE
IN APPRECIATION OF
A LONG LIFE OF
CHRISTIAN FAITHFULNESS

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INTRODUCTION

THE MINISTRY OF CONSOLATION

SHAKESPEARE once wrote, "How many things by season seasoned are!" Among the songs we sing there are some which express our thanksgiving and are suitable for harvest-home festivals. There are the sweet songs of the Christmastide and the glorious anthems of Easter. But there are some hymns which express the mood of the heart no matter what the season may be. "Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal," is a message that may bring comfort to a broken heart whether the earth is covered with the white snows of winter or golden with summer harvests. Sorrows do not wait for the seasons.

How to get Heaven's message into the earth is our perpetual problem. The love and comfort of God, the grace and power of Christ, the ministration of Divine Provi-

dence in human affairs, is the revelation which our human need constantly calls for.

It was said of James G. Blaine that he had a remarkable memory of persons. He could recall names and faces after a lapse of many years. But even his memory was at times treacherous. It is said that if he met some one who claimed his friendship, he assumed the air of familiarity and allowed the conversation to drift on in the hope that it would reveal some clue to identity. If this did not appear, he was accustomed to ask in a confidential tone, "How's the old trouble?" Almost invariably this revealed some statement which made it possible for him to place his friend, recalling his name and the circumstances of their meeting. It was a keen bit of psychology that the great statesman exhibited. "How is the old trouble?" Everybody has had trouble. In dealing with it we reveal our attitude toward life and expose the secret places of the heart.

When James Tissot, the great French artist, was engaged in a series of paintings on the "Parisian Woman" and had gone to a great cathedral that in its sacred atmosphere he might study the choir singer as a

model for one of the pictures of the series, something distinctly religious came into his life. He saw a vision of "Christ, the Consoler." He hurried from the place, shut himself in his studio, and painted the vision which he had seen. Peasants sat amid the smoking embers and ruins of their home and bending over them was the form of the Son of God. When this picture was exhibited, the immediate interest and reverent enthusiasm with which it was accepted by the public gave him a new purpose in his work and furnished the incentive for him to paint that great series of pictures on the life of Christ.

It is this vision of "Christ, the Consoler" which touches the heart of the world. We think of Jesus as a great teacher, and no ideals have ever been furnished by the religious teachers of the world which have been ethically finer than those which he furnished for the guidance of the race. We think of him as our Saviour from the guilt and power of sin, and the vision of the cross will always have power to arrest the attention of the world. His correct life—flawless and unsoiled by any contact with the world—forever remains as

the perfect example for our humanity. But Jesus the Consoler, Jesus the Comforter, Jesus the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, he who went wherever trouble was and dared to stand in the presence of death and say, "I am the resurrection and the life" and "Because I live, ye shall live also"—it is this Jesus that touches the heart of the world. There was a divine urgency in his life which moved him in the direction of every human need.

We are in a world where sin has worked its havoc and left sorrow in its wake. How will men react to this experience? Some years ago Harold Begbie wrote his book on *Twice Born Men*. The subtitle of the book was "A Clinic in Regeneration." One of the beneficial influences of that book was the fact that everyone who read it immediately set up his own "clinic in regeneration," and out of the circle of his acquaintances and friendship and experience realized anew that the new birth was certainly operative. When men respond by faith to Jesus Christ as their Saviour, there is transformation. This is God's method of dealing with sin.

But what shall we say of sorrow? Here,

too, a clinic might be set up. Every man who has had acquaintance with the reactions of the human heart in the hour of affliction knows that God has a special message for those who suffer. Not always is that message received. Sometimes the reaction is unfavorable. "Who shall separate us from the love of God?" said Paul, and then among the forces which might probably separate a soul from God he inquires, "Shall tribulation?" The simple fact is that on more than one occasion tribulation has done this very thing.

"My heart is as hard as stone," said a father dry-eyed, rebellious, defiant when his son had suddenly met his death by drowning. No argument that I might use, no word of Scripture that I could quote, no prayers were able for a time to break the bitter rebellion of his soul.

"No man cared for my soul," cried David on a certain occasion. But there are those who have come to the sad hour when they have imagined that even God did not care. In loneliness, in grief, in a battle whose outcome was uncertain, amid unfair circumstances, overburdened, misunderstood, they have lost their faith in God. Because

God has not cared—they have not cared.
One of the saddest lines in all literature is
the sobbing lament of Mildred in Brown-
ing's "A Blot on the Scutcheon,"—

"I—I was so young! . . .
And I had no mother;
God forgot me: so, I fell."

Well might we cry out, "If thou withdraw
thyself from me, ah, whither can I go!"

"Upon the white sea sand
There sat a pilgrim band
Telling the losses that their lives had known,
While evening waned away
From breezy cliff and bay,
And the strong tides went out with weary moan.
There were some who mourned their youth
With a most tender ruth,
For the brave hopes and memories ever green;
And one upon the West
Turned an eye that would not rest
For the fair hills whereon its joys had been.
Some talked of vanished gold,
Some of proud honours told,
Some spoke of friends who were their friends no
more;
And one of a green grave
Far away beyond the wave,
While he sits here so lonely on the shore.
But when their tales were done,
There spoke among them one,

A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free:
 'Sad losses ye have met,
 But mine is sadder yet,
 For the believing heart has gone from me.'
 'Then, alas!' those pilgrims said,
 'For the living and the dead,
 For life's deep shadows and the heavy cross;
 For the wrecks of land and sea;
 But, howe'er it came to thee,
 Thine, brother, is life's last and sorest loss,
 For the believing heart has gone from thee—
 Ah, the believing heart has gone from thee.'

How can we be saved from such an irreparable loss? Only by faith—faith in God, faith in the beneficence of his will, in what Robert Louis Stevenson called "the ultimate decency of things," in the future, in immortality, in "a land that is fairer than day," in heaven and the opportunity it will furnish to see those whom we have "loved long since and lost awhile." It is "this hope that supports us still while here on earth we stay." We are saved by it. We are comforted through its ministry to our hearts. Time heals some hurts. Friends bring encouragement by their sympathy. Flowers turn our thoughts from brooding. There are songs which lift the soul like a tide. But when the mind is confused and the soul in panic, when the future is dark with

forebodings and we have lost our way, there is nothing that will restore sanity to our thinking and stability to our conduct like a mighty faith in Almighty God. We are destroyed by doubt. We are directed by affirmations. When questions arise about the goodness of God and the misfortune and loss which we experience, when the soul flings out through pain-drawn lips the interrogation, "Why?" and there is no answer save the echo of our despairing call, we need faith. In such an hour the one who can restore faith to the soul has rendered indeed a ministry of comfort. "I reckon that the sufferings of this present world are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us," wrote Paul, but there are some who have not been able to make this reckoning. It requires faith to survey all of the conflict of human experience and still sing a song of faith and lift a prayer of resignation.

"There is no song within our glad heart singing
But has an echo of some minor strain.
There is no happy day its gladness bringing,
But has one hour that's filled with hidden pain.
There is no rose so beautiful, so sweet
But has a thorn amid its scented leaf,

There is no life so perfect, so complete

But has its doubts, its cares, and bitter grief.

Hope on, dear heart, although thy steps may
falter.

There is a God who watches over all.

What though all things on earth must fade and
alter?

Have faith in Him who marks the sparrow's
fall.

There is a heav'n so beautiful, so blest

Where neither Death nor Sorrow enters in.

Thy heavenly Father knoweth what is best.

Have faith and leave thy little life to him."

During the World War friends of mine lost their son. He was in the Naval Reserves at New London, Connecticut. They were called to his bedside before he passed away. He had come to his manhood by way of the family altar, the Sunday school and the church. At his bedside his loved ones waited with anxious hearts. "Have I been a good soldier?" he said as he looked into his father's face. And then before he went away he repeated the Lord's Prayer, and the last words he whispered were "Glorious victory." They brought his body to Duluth, where he was buried with military honors. At the service in the home many friends gathered to express their sym-

pathy. In arranging the service the father made a request which many would think strange. He said to the pastor: "We are Christian people and have a Christian hope. We feel deeply the loss of this dear boy, but, because of his own expression of faith and confidence in God and the assurance which we have of seeing him again, I want you to ask the people who are assembled to unite with us in singing the doxology at the close of the service." The minister read words of comfort from the Scriptures and spoke in appreciation of the Christian home that had laid this choice gift upon the altar of our nation. When the request was made for all to unite in singing "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow," there was a response from every one. None thought it inappropriate. All felt it was a benediction.

This is the Christian attitude toward sorrow. This is the triumph of faith over fear. This is the confidence and composure with which we may meet disaster and death when our lives are linked with the life of God.

These pages contain the effort of one minister to speak at times the message of faith and hope and comfort.

SERMONS

THE STRAIN OF LIFE

“He knoweth our frame.”—Psalm 103: 14.

IN a certain little city in the Middle West a man was engaged to move a certain residence to a new location and a new foundation. After looking it over he said, “Yes, I can do it.” When asked what furniture should be removed, what precaution taken, he replied the plates might be removed from the rail where they stood in the dining room—that was all. And that was all that was done. The house was lifted off its old foundation, where it had stood for a generation, taken into the street, moved four blocks, raised up an embankment and a terrace and placed upon its new foundation—without a glass broken, without a crack in the plaster, without a picture askew. When this mechanic examined the house he found its posts and beams and sills were

of seasoned black walnut and it had been put together conscientiously. He knew its frame.

When the Eads Bridge at Saint Louis was almost completed, the final girders were being laid and one failed to drop into its place by a fraction of an inch. The engineer measured it again, consulted his blueprints, and finally said it was according to specifications and would have to fit. So he used several cars of ice on it. The contraction of the metal took up the slight defect—and it dropped into its place. He knew its frame and knew what it was expected to do.

Over the Des Moines River in a certain village when the first bridge was built, my grandmother, a devout woman, was grieved as she found the construction men worked on Sunday. Each Sabbath day the hammering and shouting went on and she said, "The bridge will never stand—they have dishonored God and his day." Folks smiled and whispered about an old woman's fancy. But that spring when the floods came down the channel, it was swept from its piers and lost. Then they remembered what an old woman had said. There is a chance for a theological argument here. Perhaps my

grandmother had never worked it out and perhaps she had. In her belief any group of men who dishonored the Sabbath would be guilty of dishonest work, and the dishonest work was responsible for the ruin. The frame was defective and it did not stand in the time of stress.

It is in the plan of God that life shall be stalwart, strong, substantial. We have thought of God as an agriculturist—and we see his strange works in nature from the slender branch of the willow that sends out its buds so early in the spring that each one must be supplied with a fur overcoat, to the last bit of thistle down that voyages in its parachute on the autumn winds.

We have called him our shepherd—an Oriental figure of faithfulness to the flock we do not always appreciate in this country of blocked-out farms and barbed-wire fences.

We have called God our king and seen him upon his throne in royal splendor, sending forth his armies and embassies and working his sovereign will.

We have called him Father—and felt the intimacy of his love that gathers us in tenderness and solicitude to his great heart.

But let us think of him in terms of a mechanician—one who has laid the foundations of character in his providence, lifted about us the girders of his eternal truth, bound them together by the cross beams of his everlasting law, arched all life with the beautiful dome of his goodness. “He knoweth our frame.”

We are built to bear. We are fashioned for utility. We are meant for service. God is not merely experimenting with us. He does not make one strong or another weak for the sake of variety. He does not play with the issues of heart break and blood.

In a piece of fiction some years ago was a man who sought to get a secret from another, an enemy, whom he had taken prisoner. He stretched his fingers until every tendon and cord ached, he compelled him to play checkers with him through the night on a metal board while sitting on a chair so wired that every time he touched the board his body was filled with tingling pain. He tortured him to see how much he could stand and to force from his white lips an unwilling confession.

God does not test our frame just to see how much we can stand—he knows. He

knows the pressure we can bear. He remembers we are dust. He understands our weakness. But he also knows that testing time will surely come and therefore he has made us strong enough to be victorious.

The centrifugal force of this planet as it sweeps through its orbit is such that it would fly into space and stagger into a collision with some other body, were it not for the centripetal force that holds it in eternal allegiance to the sun. The centrifugal power of its revolution would send houses flying to the moon if it were not for that strange power of gravitation that keeps them steady on their foundations. The pressure of the atmosphere on a single square inch of the body would crush us were it not for other pressure from every side and the pressure from within that makes us unconscious of the pressure of the air at any given spot.

Do you not think that the God who has made these perfect adjustments of his law to the world, to all things physical, will also see that in spiritual things in which we are most like him we shall find his provisions sufficient?

“He knoweth our frame.”

I. Because of this he has made it possible for us to take upon ourselves the strain of sin.

Not that he is willing we shall—but he knows it is inevitable.

No life but has felt the inroads of iniquity. We know the mark, the break, the jar, the shock of a broken law. Indeed, if we will persist in inviting into our lives the thing that damages and destroys, God himself cannot prevent our ruin.

A few years ago the Campanile at Venice went crashing to ruin—the work of timber worms. Edwin Markham has written these lines:

“In storied Venice, down whose rippling streets
The stars go hurrying, and the white moon beats,
Stood the great Bell Tower, fronting seas and
skies—

Fronting the ages—drawing all men’s eyes;
Rooted like Teneriffe, aloft and proud,
Taunting the lightning, tearing the flying cloud.

“It marked the hours for Venice: all men said
Time cannot reach to bow that lofty head:
Time, that shall touch all else with ruin, must
Forbear to make this shaft confess its dust;
Yet all the while, in secret, without sound,
The fat worms gnawed the timbers underground.

"The twisting worm, whose epoch is an hour,
Caverned its way into the mighty tower;
And suddenly it shook, it swayed, it broke,
And fell in darkening thunder at one stroke.
The strong shaft, with an angel on the crown
Fell ruining—a thousand years went down!"¹

Nothing can prevent the overthrow of a life in which the subtle damage of sin continues to work. It destroys the noblest, the proudest, the best!

But in framing us God has given us the power of resistance. The very fact that in the presence of temptation we hesitate and fear, in doubtful choice we wait and wonder is a proof of his caution laid like a restraining hand upon the soul. The instinct of danger, the remorse for guilt, the sorrow for fault, the inner protest against an alliance with evil—it is all a part of his attempt to recover us from wrong.

It is wonderful how he can bring us back to moral health even when we have been partly damaged by sin. Indeed, all the processes of God are remedial. If the bark is knocked from a tree, nature begins at once

¹ "Vermin in the Dark," by Edwin Markham, from *Shoes of Happiness*, Doubleday, Page & Co., publishers.

to repair the defect. If the body is cut, the wound is healed with a supply of new tissue. If an embankment gives way, it is soon sown with grass and flowers. God is constantly working to repair the damage of broken laws and heal the wounds of accident.

He has placed within us some of the power of self-recovery—and then because he knows our frame and knows these human helps are soon exhausted he has let down a shaft of light from a window in heaven that the wanderer may know he is expected home. He has left the home itself and come down where the darkness and the sin is and found the poor wrecked life in its mesh of habits and he has cut the cords asunder, found him in the pit of despair and lifted him out with the strong arm of his righteousness, and said, “Come home, my child.”

2. Sorrow lays its strain on life.

This we cannot escape. It is the portion of every one upon the earth. Through the halls and corridors and rooms of this character temple echoes at times the dirge, the chant of distress, the sob of anguish, as well as the minstrelsy of joy. In and out go

thoughts garbed in black and emotions in the livery of despair, as well as the dancing sprites of our happier moods. Upon us rests the somber light of the pale moon and the mysterious stars with deep shadows lurking at every turn through which the black bats of evil dart with uneven flight as well as the sunny noons with beautiful butterflies of fancy on the wing.

What is the blackest hour in life? It is when there sweeps over us the consciousness that God has forgotten and forsaken us. Such an hour as Jesus felt in the death pangs of the cross when there was wrung from his white, pain-drawn lips the lament, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Such an hour as those Galilean boatmen experienced when the wind beat against the dripping oarsmen as the little vessel wallowed in the storm and they plucked at the garments of Jesus, who slept serenely as though rocked in the arms of his Father, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

But have you ever been grateful for the providence of God that protected you when you did not know it? Many times his grace has proven sufficient in the hour of need

and distress—but have you ever thanked God for the sorrows that have never come into your life, the visitations of grief you have been spared, the tears you have escaped? Why? Not because you were any better or more deserving than others, but because he knows your frame, and knowing it will not permit a thing to come into your experience that would disrupt your character, spoil your peace, overthrow your faith, and ruin your life.

As we stand under the strain of sin and sorrow we help another to stand. In a row of buildings some that are defective are helped to remain in place and are useful because those around them are strong. Alone they might collapse. Together they keep their place. People are like that. This is why God has placed us in society, in groups, in families. Alone we would fail. Solitary we would succumb. But with neighbors and friends and associates around us we keep our place. He has planned that we keep our place. He has planned that we shall not only remain strong for our own sake, but that we shall help to bear the strain of other lives. O for the strength to help another bear life's load!

"O Master, let me walk with thee
In lowly paths of service free;
Tell me thy secret; help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care."

AN OLD SONG

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."—Psalm 23.

OLD things are best. Their worth has stood the test of time. We look with wonder at innovations and inventions. We are surprised at new things which proclaim the genius of man. But ever and again we return to the sources of strength which our fathers knew. In times of trouble we want not entertainment but inspiration.

There are many new songs. Popular airs lilt their way across the stage and disappear. When the heart is heavy we do not care for

shallow sentiment set to music. Then it is we turn to something substantial like "Faith of our fathers" or "Love's old sweet song." Bishop McConnell tells of a regiment of Scotch Highlanders making ready one night to move up to front line trenches. When a song was suggested it was not "Brighten the corner where you are," but "Oh God, our help in ages past."

Most people like to travel. We live in an interesting world. But "there is no place like home" and the old haunts have a charm all their own. Almost anyone can say, "How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood!"

It is always an advantage to widen the circle of acquaintance. To know a great company of folks is a valuable experience. But when weary of crowds and streets and cities and all the problems of society, how good it is to meet an old friend—one who knows you, understands your moods, speaks a heartening word or listens in sympathetic silence to your confession of trouble or your recital of perplexity!

So it is with the Bible. The whole message has meaning. We stand in awe before the majesty of the law. We listen with

keen interest to the appeal of the prophet. We follow the crowds which wait on the ministry of our Master. We are convinced by the arguments of Paul. We bow before the splendor of the Apocalypse. We study the Bible as a whole. We read it through with profit. But some pages and passages are marked and thumbed and bear the evidence of repeated attention.

Such a passage is the twenty-third psalm. It has no meaning for the frivolous or gay or trifling or shallow. It cannot be appreciated in youth as well as in maturity. Times come, however, when no scripture quite fits our need like this. Baffled and broken, defeated and discouraged, with cherished plans frustrated, with that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, we are in a position to know the sweet solace of these words: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Bibles that are well used are sure to open easily to the twenty-third psalm.

David the shepherd was musing one day about his flock, and at the time of prayer his poet's soul leaped to the analogy of his own dependence upon Jehovah. What must this song have meant to the faith of ancient

Israel! What frequency of use in the Temple and in daily devotion! What a singer to have gathered up the emotions of the human heart and expressed them in such melodious measures that it has winged its way through the centuries. Men and women repeat it in the twentieth century with something of the rapture the young poet felt when he conned his new made lines amid Jesse's flocks on Judaeian hills.

People as sheep.

This figure of speech appears more than once in the Scriptures. "We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

Sheep are dependent. They must be watched and guarded, led and fed. They have become domesticated. They are not competent to defend themselves against a foe. They would perish without assistance.

Man is a creature of many relationships. He is dependent. A baby is helpless. Years pass before maturity can be claimed. The very dependence of the child upon the parents and the obligation of parents to care for the child through a long period of time would seem to be one of God's ways of holding the family together as a unit of society.

We sometimes glory in our independ-

ence. We make our declaration of it boastingly. We have heard much lately of self-determination. But that is something that may send our ship onto the rocks as well as into the harbor. Youth feels it must be free and thereby runs perilous risks. Life goes wrong without certain well-defined attachments. There are truths which abide. Some principles are stable. Greatness begins not when we announce our independence and swagger in self-importance but when we learn how very dependent we are and what we can safely put our trust in. Even Jesus was dependent on the Heavenly Father and in surrender said, "Not my will but thine be done."

Then, too, sheep are easily led. Where one goes others follow. If the bell-wether finds a passage through the hedge the flock is soon on the other side.

This is what the prophet sensed when he wrote, "All we like sheep have gone astray." We do some things that are foolish and extravagant and evil simply because others do. We are powerfully influenced by public opinion. We are slaves of habit and custom. We follow the style no matter how ridiculous it may be. In the dress we wear,

the books we read, the games we play, the vocabulary we use we proclaim the ease by which we are led.

Gladstone said, "The genius of government is to make it hard to do wrong and easy to do right." This takes into account this trait of human nature.

A mob is a mass movement toward evil. Men have been swept along by a crowd and been participants in an offense for which the crowd was responsible when as individuals they would have shuddered at the thought of such an offense. A revival is the organization of this human impulse on a helpful and constructive basis. There may be some who, if they are ever swept into the Kingdom, must depend on some tidal wave of spiritual power that lifts a community. This tendency to move *en masse* is more apparent when evil is involved than when good is the objective.

God as a Shepherd.

It is good to think of him so. There are those who have speculated on his being as though he were some vague hypothesis. To some God is a bad dream to be thought of in the pinch of misfortune. In the opinion of others he is a Judge who examines the

books that contain minute records of our deeds and misdeeds. He is a King in all the splendor of a divine royalty to others. The nearest approach in the Old Testament to a New-Testament interpretation is David's analogy of the shepherd, a picture of tenderness and solicitude and sacrificial love. Happy is he who with a personal and present faith can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

The Oriental shepherd found certain tools useful in his work. He carried a staff on which he at times leaned while watching the flock and whose crooked end was used to draw back some stray sheep that had endangered its life on rocky ledge or miry bog. The rod was a stout stick carried for discipline and as a weapon against wild beasts. The shepherd's pipe, a wind instrument on which he beguiled lonely hours, was played with certain strains at eventide and called the scattered flock together ere they were folded for the night.

There is a suggestion in this old song of all these offices.

God as our Shepherd extends to us his powerful help. "He restoreth my soul!" Constant renewal is needed by our inner

life. The strength required for each day, the expenditure of nervous energy in our work, the exhaustion felt from contact with the world, the toll of grief, would soon leave the soul depleted. Our vitality needs resuscitation. This is supplied in either a sensuous or spiritual way. Those who are pleasure mad and rush away to any new thrill offered their jaded souls are trying to find in material things that which can only be given by God. In the Sabbath day and its invitation to rest and worship, in the privilege of prayer, in the comfortable consciousness of pardon and peace divinely given, God restores the soul.

There is a picture of Jesus as a shepherd painted by a modern artist. It visualizes for us the parable of the lost sheep. In the painting one cannot see the face of the shepherd. He has toiled all night hunting for the one missing sheep. Out on a mountain with precipitous walls he finds it on a perilous ledge caught in some brambles. The piteous cries have echoed through the canyon walls. A bird of prey in wheeling flight is near. The dawn of day is just beginning to touch the mountain rim when the shepherd finds the sheep that had wan-

dered away and was lost. He leans far over the canyon wall, endangering his own life to accomplish its rescue. In some such way a ministry of rescue and restoration is wrought by God to imperiled souls.

Protection too is given. Amid dangers and in the presence of enemies provision is made for comfort and confidence. Even fear is taken away. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." The shadow of death! It is on everything—the golden curls of youth and the silver locks of age. We cannot escape it. But—only the shadow! We should not be afraid of a shadow! Perhaps when our time comes we may find death a relief. The pain of it will be removed through a Christian faith. "Now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man, . . . that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2. 8, 9, 14, 15). In that hour of

passing the strengthening knowledge "Thou art with me" may be ours.

Then at eventide we hear the call. Just as the shepherd played on his pipes and the grazing herd listened and answered to the summons and were led to the corral at the close of day, so God draws us to himself. By strange presentiments, by intimations of immortality amid the meditations of old age, by hope that springs eternal in the human breast and never seems so rational as when we hear the Master say, "Because I live ye shall live also," by impulses and emotions strangely given and comforting in their influence, we feel the spell of that mystic music that calls us to another world. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

ALL THINGS FOR GOOD

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.”—Romans 8. 28.

IN northern Minnesota is a lake which is said to be “bottomless.” By this is meant that no measuring line which they have used has been adequate to sound its depth. This verse has a similar quality. Who can fathom the significance of such a statement as this that Paul has made? There is no promise in the Bible so difficult to reconcile to the varying experiences of life.

It is easy to believe that all things are working for our good when prosperity smiles upon us, when our friends are around us, when every plan we make is happily matured and all our dreams come true. It is not so easy to believe it when adversity smites us in the face and we meet sorrow and loss and misfortune. It takes faith and fortitude to sing—

“Go, then, earthly fame and treasure!

Come, disaster, scorn, and pain!

In thy service, pain is pleasure;

With thy favor, loss is gain.

I have called thee, ‘Abba, Father;’

I have stayed my heart on thee:

Storms may howl, and clouds may gather,

All must work for good to me.”

There are two propositions which will help us understand this verse. They constitute a premise from which we must proceed.

First, all experience is a means to an end, and that end is character. We talk about the school of experience, but the important thing is not the school and all its paraphernalia of books and charts and lessons; the important thing is the pupil. We speak of the battle of life and are sometimes lost in the din and smoke and confusion of the conflict when the great necessity is that the soldier shall carry on. “One thing is needful,” said Jesus to Martha. “I seek not yours but you,” wrote Paul, and it describes the attitude of God. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” In the hour we stand before him it is not fame or wealth or genius that counts, but character.

Then we must remember too that God is a God of love. He has benevolent intentions. He seeks our advantage. He would not willfully harm us. Pagan gods were vindictive. They had passions like men and acted with hatred and revenge. But the highest revelation we have of God is that of the heavenly Father. There is no attribute we associate with him like love. When we think of his wisdom we despair. When we consider his power we tremble. When we contemplate his majesty we are filled with awe. But his love inspires us to approach him in confidence. "We love him because he first loved us."

If these two facts are kept in mind they will help us understand this baffling statement "that all things work together for good to them that love God." They constitute an attitude of soul. When we accept them we can look upon our misfortunes with sanity. Our circumstances may not be changed but our viewpoint is. We no longer regard ourselves as favorites of heaven who must be sheltered and pampered, but acknowledge the need of discipline in the development of character and discover the meaning of it in God's love.

Then what?

I. We will make the best of things. We will deliberately undertake to find the benefit each circumstance and experience holds for us. We will make conquest of our discouragement. We will take the optimistic view.

A Nuremburg glass-cutter one day laid his spectacles on his bench and then inadvertently dropped some acid on them. When he picked them up he found the acid had taken the glaze from the lens. He did not cry out, "My spectacles are ruined!" He was interested. He began certain experiments with acid and glass, and out of these came much of the decorative art upon our glassware. He made the best of his misfortune, and it worked ultimately for good.

Pearls are made by the coming of some foreign substance into the shell of the mollusk. The little particle of grit irritates and annoys. Then a secretion is thrown around it. This hardens. Then more and more it is built up—and when the shell is opened we find a pearl. Many of the gems of character are formed by assuming the right attitude to some irritating thing that has been thrust into our lives.

Chimes ring out from the noble tower of First Church, Duluth, Minnesota. When one stands beneath them they are overpowering in their clamor. Reverberations, overtones and undertones play about the place until one can scarcely distinguish the melody. But a short distance away these false notes have faded out and the melody peals forth with wondrous beauty. Sometimes when trouble comes upon us it crashes in terrible discord, and a new vantage ground is necessary ere we can know its meaning or its message.

If you believe that all things work together for good in God's plan for you, it will become the habit of your life to discover the good in every event, the comfort in every sorrow, the bow of promise on every storm cloud, the advantage in every misfortune.

2. Accepting the premise that all experience may be disciplinary and that God is good, we can be assured of the perfect adaptation of God's grace to our need. Whatever be the event that assails us from without, we may count on that reenforcement from within which shall enable us to meet it. There is an abundance of God's

grace available for every need. We may make heavy drafts upon it.

There are temptations which assail human life when safety and security can only come through the gift of God's grace, the infusion of a divine spirit upon the heart, the reenforcement of our own desires to be good and faithful to such an extent that they will hold us through the testing time. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Jesus did not offer his disciples immunity from temptation, but a power with which to conquer it.

There are sorrows in the world which only God's grace can assuage. Death brings sadness because of separation, but there are sorrows infinitely worse than those which death imposes. As we grow in knowledge of the world's tragedy and heart-break our amazement grows that there is not more death.

At Barry au Bac, in northern France, is Hill 108, the scene of severe fighting dur-

ing the war. It was taken and retaken. It was mined and undermined. It was held alternately by French and German forces. Here and there along its slopes may be found entrances to underground passages. On its crest one looks into a yawning crater where the entire top of the hill has been blown off. There are numerous cavities, their walls pock-marked by bursting shells. The whole hill churned to a dust heap that is filled with bits of shrapnel stands as a mute but eloquent witness of the terrible conflict. Even nature has seemed reluctant to try again to cover it with vegetation. Yet on the very top of this desolate waste on a summer day, three years after the war was ended, I found a poppy in full bloom. Some kindly wind had carried a seed and dropped it there. Amid all the ruin of the place it had thrust its tiny roots into the soil and sent its little stem aloft and at last spread its crimson petals. The red bloom seemed not only a testimony of the sacrifices of brave men who had died there, but a promise of nature's recovery of the hill to beauty, an assurance that God can send some messenger of good will and tenderness into the most tragic situation we may know.

THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."—2 Corinthians 12. 7-10.

WE are in a world of suffering. None escape it. When we speak the language of pain all understand. Bishop William A. Quayle puts it this way:¹

"I plucked a feather from an eagle's wing,
And thought to write a song of epic might,
Whose deep-toned music should men's dreams
excite
And plaudits—which as seas should swing

¹ Taken from *The Blessed Life*, p. 134.

46 A CANDLE OF COMFORT

In ever-widening billows, and should ring
Like living laughter that should change the
 night
And silence into joy and grace and light,
And make its gloom and solitudes to sing.
I wrote—and no one read my poem through.
And then I found a feather from a mourning
 dove,
Dropped from its wing in flying through a
 wood,
And wrote a psalm of pain and pity, true
To life, and tender with immortal love:
And weary hearts both read and understood."

Paul suffered and developed under the experience a philosophy of suffering. We do not know what the "thorn in the flesh" was. Some suggest it was poor eyesight, others an impediment of speech, and still others offer scriptural references for a physical malady. We know Luke, a physician, traveled with him as a companion in his arduous journeys. In the reaction of Paul to his thorn in the flesh we may discover a process by which the soul comes to new strength, for this phrase has come to symbolize any painful experience to which we may become reconciled by God's help. The steps in Paul's development under suffering are suggested by four words.

Repulsion. He besought the Lord to remove it. How natural! Was there ever a sorrow or pain or loss or reverse in which we did not at once complain, "Why should I be thus afflicted?" We shrink from the storm, even though its lightning may equalize the stratas of atmosphere, its wind sweep the community free of foul vapors, its rain cleanse the earth. We shrink from the surgeon's knife though it removes an abnormal growth and saves a body from decay and death. We want to know "why"—the very thing that is veiled from us.

It is advantageous to take our plaint to God. One purpose of prayer is to find out the facts as God knows them. Abraham besought him for Sodom and by importunity obtained the promise that the city would be spared if ten righteous inhabitants could be found. But Sodom was destroyed. There were not ten who qualified. This God knew. Abraham found it out. In the garden Jesus cried, "If it is possible"—but God did not take the cup away. Evidently, it was necessary. Paul "besought the Lord thrice that it might depart"—but God did not remove the thorn. He did something

better. Rather than seek to understand our sorrow we should seek its utility. Instead of trying to learn its origin we should learn its discipline. When we find that the "thorn" has come to stay it is best to make friends with it. Whatever God means by it will be useful to learn and worth all its costs.

Revelation. "My grace is sufficient for thee." There is no emergency in life to which God cannot adjust his grace. If God does not do what we want, he will do something that is better. We often ask in ignorance. He gives in wisdom.

When Helen Keller was a child she was rebellious under her limitations. She could not see. She could not run and play as other children. Her little soul cried out in protest. One day standing on the porch amid the honeysuckles the deep prayer of her whole nature was "Give me light." Just then she felt a step was approaching. She was gathered into an embrace and her lips were kissed. The teacher had come who led her from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from limitation to a liberal education, from obscurity to prominence. Her cry for light was answered

not as she expected, but in the best way possible in the circumstances.

In Habakkuk's vision "God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran." Wilderness places they were—and even in such places he is ready to flash out the splendor of his presence.

The Israelites beheld in the fiery furnace the form of one like unto the Son of God, and since that hour the faithful have heard him say:

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply,
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

Even as Saint John imprisoned on the barren, wind-swept isle of Patmos saw an apocalypse of eternal glory, so in our extremities God lifts the veil ofttimes and we behold things unutterable.

In a certain art gallery was a picture called "Cloudland." It was at the end of a long room. It looked like a tumultuous mass of storm clouds in wild confusion. But approaching it, the visitor found the canvas was filled with cherub faces. Billow on billow of happy, smiling angelic faces

where clouds were promised! So many of the storm clouds of life fade out as we approach them,

“And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile.”

Reconciliation. When our rebellion dies out under God’s revelation we are ready for this step in our development under suffering. “I will rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me,” declared Paul.

There is a rainbow in every storm cloud if we are only at the right angle to see it. In order that we may see the rainbow the sun must face the storm, and if we are to see the utility of suffering the whole problem must be radiant with the sunlight of God’s will. We have known the deepest truth of life and touched the highest point of privilege when the heart says, “Thy will be done.”

“My God knows best! Then tears may fall:
In his great heart I find my rest;
For he, my God, is over all;
And he is love, and he knows best.”

Sometimes disaster breaks on human life

and it is met with brute strength and hurled off by self-assertion and sheer defiance. One cannot but admire such a spirit. Henley describes it:

“In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced or cried aloud,
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.”

With more Christian courage Browning sings:

“Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge
the throe!”

But Paul is not merely resigned. He rejoices. “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake.” One is overawed by a faith so triumphant. It is as though an archangel were standing in the sun.

Recuperation. “When I am weak then I am strong.” At last we learn that greatness of soul is not in independence but dependence. It is a great hour when we commit

ourselves to God and depend on him. The eagle builds her nest amid frowning cliffs and raises her young on dangerous ledges, but there comes a time when the downy nest is destroyed and the eaglets are pushed off and made to try their wings. To more than one who has been tossed by trouble into midair has come the interesting discovery that the soul has wings.

Great achievements have been wrought not by those who have been free from suffering but by those who have been strengthened and purified by it.

John Milton, blind and depending on that inner vision, sets out "to justify the ways of God to man" and pens his immortal poem, "Paradise Lost." Bunyan, imprisoned in Bedford jail, is free in soul and travels from the Slough of Despond to the Delectable Mountains and gives the record of his journey in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Tennyson grieving for his friend, Arthur Hallam, looks up, is comforted, and sings for all the world of sorrowing ones his "In Memoriam." When George Matheson, the lover, was spurned because of his approaching blindness, it set him singing of a love that would not let him go. Even the Master

went through this process. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." In Gethsemane he cried out for the removal of this cup of suffering, was strengthened by angel ministrants when he said, "Thy will be done," and arose undaunted and "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." "The disciple is not above his master."

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

"If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."—Job 14. 14.

A LITTLE child was given to walking in his sleep. One night his mother was aroused and hurrying to the stairs found him there. Gathering him into her arms and bringing him to normal consciousness with caresses and kisses, she asked him, "Where was my little darling going?" He replied, "I was going to see what's inside of the dark." The child's answer stands for the expedition we shall all undertake some time. Charles Frohman, on the sloping decks of the *Lusitania*, talking of approaching death, said: "Why be afraid of death? It is the most beautiful adventure of all."

The immortality of the soul is one of the noblest themes that has ever engaged the mind of man. In the presence of the grave the ever-recurrent question appears, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The answer to the question is affirmative. This

is the verdict of science, of the gospel, and the human heart.

Science. We do not fear the voice of science to-day. We have heard some reverberations of an old conflict between science and religion, but the unfriendliness of other days has passed. The truth does not contradict itself. Whether we seek it in the laboratory or in the upper room we shall find it all a part of a divine orderliness. Our concern should not be to bolster up some theory, but to find the truth.

Immortality is in a realm where the facts cannot be dealt with in the same exactness as in the realm of matter. There have been those who have attempted the laboratory method. They claim wonderful results. This much is certain: science has not disproved immortality. Its findings in the physical universe furnish a basis for argument in the spiritual. What it has taught us of the world we live in carries implications that are encouraging. Science has at least cast upon this subject the weight of probability. Dr. Martineau once said: "Man does not believe in immortality because he has ever proved it, but he is ever trying to prove it because he cannot help believing it."

In the natural world we are told that matter is indestructible and that there is a constant conservation of energy. There may be the separation of substances, but every particle is preserved. Matter is not annihilated. Forces may be transferred to new channels, but they continue. Does it not seem reasonable that this law that applies to inanimate nature shall govern consciousness and intelligence and personality?

In nature confusion precedes order. Science and the Bible tell the same story. Chaos turns to cosmos. The void takes shape until it is "very good." Now and then a stratum of the earth slips and men call it an earthquake, or the internal heat breaks out in volcanic eruption, but in spite of this the planet is habitable and beautiful. But in the moral realm we behold a chaotic condition. There are startling contrasts of sin and righteousness. Peaks of holiness rise alongside canyons of despair. Rippling laughter is interrupted by sobbing sorrow. Some go through life with never a care, others have nothing but care. It would seem at times that the guilty are never punished and the blameless never rewarded. What confusion and disorder! There must

be a place where these inequalities are adjusted, wrongs righted, incongruities reconciled, sins punished, and virtues rewarded. Otherwise creation is a blunder.

Science also points out that the consummation of all evolutionary processes is man. There was a time when he became a "living soul." He was given potentialities beyond other creatures. "Man is nature's last and costliest work. Can it be that this finest product of nature, the result of intelligence and love, aimed at from the beginning and reached at a cost immeasurable, shall not be conserved in growing beauty and power?" Dr. Lyman Abbott has said: "Immortality is not so much a demonstrated fact as it is a necessary anticipation. Without it all evolution would be meaningless. It is inconceivable that God would spend years to make a Gladstone, a Lincoln, a Jefferson, a Shakespeare that he might have a body with which to fill a grave." There is something more in store for us than oblivion. The intricate mechanism of a watch would scarcely be worth putting together if it could run only twenty-four hours. "He that made us with such large discourse looking before and after" certainly did not mean

the grave should be a terminus. It is only a way station.

Henry Drummond taught us that in the spiritual realm the same wheels turn as in the natural realm, only we do not see the wheels. If this is true, then what science has shown us of the material universe gives ground for the belief that in the spiritual universe we have a right to an affirmative answer to the question, "If a man die shall he live again?"

Gospel. Here we pass from probabilities to certainties. In all ethnic religions there is a doctrine of immortality. This doctrine clears with the doctrine of God. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the fullest revelation of immortality in Christ.

He taught it. When the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, came to him with a hypothetical case and asked for an opinion, he brought his answer to its climax in the words: "Have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living." (See Mark 12. 18-27.) These words possess no cogency

or meaning unless these patriarchs were alive.

In the transfiguration Moses and Elias appeared and talked with him. They were alive and conscious. They were recognized.

He repeatedly asserted he would conquer death. His own resurrection is abundantly attested. It was a historical fact. If it had been a myth, it would have been exploded long ago.

Robert Ingersoll stood at the grave of his brother and said: "Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We call aloud and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead there comes no word; but in the night of death hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of an angel's wing."

Christian faith believes that Jesus touched these mountains of eternity and descended into this vale of time. It believes that the voice that speaks is not our own voice but his: "I am the resurrection and the life." The star of hope is the star of Bethlehem. The rustle of an angel's wing is from the sweeping pinions of the resurrec-

tion angel who rolled away the stone and said: "He is not here. He is risen as he said."

Jesus knew that the hope of immortality was instinctive and inevitable. He approved that fact. If we were not justified in such an expectation, he would have set us right. "If it were not so I would have told you." "Because I live ye shall live also."

Human heart. Here resides this great and glorious expectation. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," but it is never so sane and reasonable as when illumined by trust in God.

Wordsworth found intimations of immortality in the recollections of childhood. Most people find these in the longings of old age. He pictured the child coming into the world trailing clouds of glory. We think of the soul going out in clouds of triumph.

How shall we explain this native impulse? God has put this conviction in our hearts. He has put it there because he means not to disappoint us but gratify us. He has made us hungry because he has bread enough and to spare. He has made us

homesick because he has a place prepared for us.

As death approaches this conviction increases. The reality of life beyond death intensifies.

Paul said: "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

George Eliot exclaimed, "Oh, may I join the choir invisible."

Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his swan song declared his confidence:

"I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."

Approaching death Victor Hugo said:

"I feel in myself the future life. I am rising, I know, toward the sky. The sunshine is over my head. Heaven lights me with the reflection of unknown worlds.

"You say the soul is nothing but the result of bodily powers; why, then, is my soul the more luminous when my bodily powers begin to fail? Winter is on my head and eternal spring is in my heart.

"The nearer I approach the end, the

plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of the worlds which invite me. It is marvelous, yet simple. It is a fairy tale, and it is a history. For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose, verse, history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, song—I have tried all. But I feel that I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me. When I go down to the grave I can say, like so many others, ‘I have finished my day’s work,’ but I cannot say, ‘I have finished my life.’ My day’s work will begin the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open with the dawn. I improve every hour because I love this world as my fatherland. My work is only a beginning. My work is hardly above its foundation. I would be glad to see it mounting and mounting forever. The thirst for the infinite proves infinity.”

Robert Browning thus declared his wholesome philosophy :

“Have you found your life distasteful?

My life did and does smack sweet.

Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?

Mine I saved and hold complete.

Do your joys with age diminish?
 When mine fail me I'll complain.
 Must in death your daylight finish?
 My sun sets to rise again."

"Good morning, and how is John Quincy Adams this morning?" said a Boston friend to the great statesman as he met him on the street.

"Thank you," replied the octogenarian. "John Quincy Adams himself is quite well, quite well, I thank you. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering on its foundations. Time and seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. Its walls are much shattered and it trembles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon. But he himself is quite well, quite well."

"If a man die, shall he live again?"

In the light of testimony from science, from the gospel, and from the human heart let us change the interrogation to an affirmation.

A PLACE FOR YOU

“I go to prepare a place for you.”—John
14. 2.

“WHAT is the place of your residence?” said some one to that world-wandering evangelist Bishop William Taylor. “I’m residing on the earth at present, but do not know how soon I shall change my residence.” Once Wordsworth said, “I should like to visit Italy again before I move to another planet.”

They spoke for all of us. Our lives are not stationary. We attach ourselves to a street and number, a city or town, and feel ourselves inseparable from that geographical location. It is a beautiful world we live in and one should not be indifferent to all its moods of spring and summer, its enveloping clouds or flooding sunshine, its music arising from mountain stream or forest, its noises of toiling humanity. We are a part of it. But some time we will change our residence.

God evidently does not want us to think

morbidly of death. He would have us live buoyantly and gladly—not morbidly. When a sea voyage is begun there is so much to interest the passenger in the ship itself—the tugs that tow it into the open, the flutter of handkerchiefs, and the shower of good wishes, the smiles and tears. We set out to explore the ship—its intricate mechanism, the gayety and laughter of the deck. The voyage itself proves fascinating—the days of dreaming, the nights of rest, the everchanging sea with its long roll of billows crested with lacelike loveliness; the path of light that shimmers on the surface when all is calm, the long lane of phosphorescence that lies in the wake at night, the majesty of mighty waves that arise mountain-like and range on range plunge upon you while the ship struggles through unwaveringly.

It is all so wonderful that we do not think much of the port to which we sail or the country for which we are booked until the voyage is about over.

But now and then death comes near and the question strikes at our hearts—“Whither?” Hundreds of thousands of souls pass through the gate marked “Exit”

—or is it “Entrance”? Is the grave a blind alley or thoroughfare? Is this earthly existence one over which a funeral service writes “Finis,” or does it only jot down the final period of the “Preface,” and turn the page where the real romance of life begins?

We believe there is something beyond. We do not explain it, apologize for it, argue about it, speculate upon it. It is a belief to be accepted, rejoiced in, affirmed and reaffirmed with gladness of heart. We believe it because we believe in Jesus who said, “I go to prepare a place for you.”

“A place”—we have pondered much on this. What kind of a place is it and where is it? One is surprised he did not say more about it. His main effort was to get heaven into men rather than men into heaven. Yet in our emphasis of the spiritual and universal we ought not to overlook this promise of location. It is not only a condition but a country. He could not adequately describe it or show us the blue prints or make us comprehend its particulars. He evidently wanted us to be content with the fact that if he prepared it, that was all that could be desired. He said, “I am the way—follow me.”

Our fettered imaginations can only feebly anticipate that "sweet and blessed country, the home of God's elect." Its glory will surpass the sunrises of earth when that orb comes up with trembling shafts of light, through filmy curtains of clouds, and fills the eastern sky with opalescent splendors. Its expanses will exceed the wide stretches of prairies with their waving fields of growing grain. Its grandeur can only be dimly suggested by up-leaping mountains that offer a footpath to the blue skies. Its loveliness will be as a garden more appealing than all earth's flowers—from the dogtooth violet that peeps out in early spring in answer to the blue bird's call to the riot of color that decorates country highways in the late summer with cloth of gold. Its harmonies will be more alluring than all the sweet symphonies of earth from the gurgling laughter of babies to the union of all earth's choirs in one "Hallelujah Chorus."

There is more signified in that word "place" than our present knowledge can appreciate. Did you ever notice that an increase of knowledge increases the meaning and beauty of any revelation of God? David said, "The heavens declare the glory

of God." That is forever true. But the heavens David knew were only those he could see with the naked eye as he watched the stars pass in stately processional while tending his father's flocks by night. Astronomy has given us an enlarged heaven. We have marked the path of planet and comet. We have charted the sky. The telescope has revealed points of illumination otherwise invisible. How much more with our increased knowledge do the heavens declare the glory of God! The Master said "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." But the world of that time was in no sense populated as it is to-day. Civilization only fringed the Mediterranean Sea. But the love of God was greater than that. It contemplated and included all the succeeding populations of the earth. It compasses the world of folks wherever they may be found in crowded cities or silent deserts, at firesides or tossed on high seas. As we increase our idea of the world we increase our conception of the love of God.

"I go to prepare a place for you," said Christ. We may not know where it is, but our increased knowledge of the uni-

verse makes it necessary to think of it in larger terms than ever before. Once men thought the earth a plane and the sky a domelike covering over it, but now we know that with every revolution of the earth a right angle from the little area on which we stand sweeps like a great hand the complete circuit of the universe, "a place"—vast enough to receive all the worthies of the past and present and of time to come.

The chief joy of heaven will not be the place but the people. It is a false notion that conditions alone improve us. Our happiness depends on what we are, not where we are. People who find no enjoyment in association with decent, right-living folks here on earth would not find enjoyment associating with them in heaven. Take sin and its baneful influence out of any community and advertise to the world that it contains "nothing that defiles, that works abomination or makes a lie" and emigration would set in that way at once. The people of a place are its charm. Happiness depends on personality more than environment.

But man is under the domination of that idea that changed conditions are necessary

to make him happy. So we have the pleasing fancy that in heaven all the things which are desirable will be preserved for us and all things undesirable removed. The Bible seems to encourage this view. Paul's life was one of conflict, so he referred to that which awaited him as a "crown." John on little lonesome Patmos declares, "There shall be no more sea." The writer to the Hebrews whose Jerusalem had been destroyed said, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." To penniless disciples who had forsaken all to follow him Jesus promised "mansions."

When Wilberforce and Hall were exchanging views on "What is heaven?" the former, who felt the malignity and cruelty of life, said "Love," and the latter, who had spent the years in restless energy, said "Rest." Each wanted what here they had been denied.

A crippled boy in a wheeled chair was observed by a sympathetic lady who, pitying his helplessness, remarked to a bystander, "Poor fellow—what has he to look forward to?" The cripple overheard and turning with a smile said, pleasantly, "Wings some day."

These immortal longings are placed within us to be satisfied. God made us hungry because he has bread enough and to spare. "I go to prepare a place for you," said Jesus. So fondly has man dreamed of it that he has taken the dearest term of earth to describe it. I wish that the comfort and hope and reality of that place might rest upon all Christian people as they rest on one father's heart, who, after more than eighty years of Christian living now sits in darkness of earth, but with spiritual outlook undimmed and with a voice that trembles with age but not with uncertainty, sings:

"I will sing you a song of that beautiful land,
The far away home of the soul,
Where no storms ever beat on the glittering
strand,
While the years of eternity roll.
O that home of the soul in my visions and
dreams,
Its bright, jasper walls I can see;
Till I fancy but thinly the veil intervenes
Between the fair city and me."

A CONTINUOUS EASTER

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."—Colossians 3. 1-2.

THE Easter message is one of immortal hope. George Frederick Watts' picture of "Hope" is a portrayal of hope against hope. A crouching figure has surmounted the earth which moves amid clouds, and with bandaged eyes leans listening over a harp to catch its music when all the strings have been broken save one. Christian hope takes the bandages from our vision and fears not to face the facts as they are. Looking above it sights a star in the sky, and when it bends over the harp of life it repairs the broken strings and sweeps them once more into melody. Easter hope is radiant beside a riven tomb. It bids earth rejoice. It proclaims a triumph over death and the grave.

Job asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Jesus said, "If it were not so I

would have told you." Two "ifs," but at what extremes of thinking!—one a speculation, the other an assurance. The man of Uz gave utterance to a world-old cry. Jesus dismissed the problem as almost negligible. He was so sure about it that no argument was necessary.

Shakespeare makes Hamlet speak concerning death and what lies beyond it. The gloomy Dane with suicidal intent is distressed with perplexity and despair:

"To be or not to be: that is the question."

In what a different world we find ourselves as we read Paul's argument for immortality in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians! Here is fresh air and sunshine for the soul. He cited the appearances of Jesus after death. He declares the tragic failure of the gospel if this immortal assurance be abandoned—"If Christ be not risen," then "our preaching is vain," "your faith also is vain," "ye are found false witnesses," "ye are yet in your sins," and "they that are fallen asleep are perished." To surrender belief in life eternal to the mind acquainted with Christian evidences is unthinkable. So we exult with the great apostle. "Oh death, where is thy sting?"

O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Easter message stands perpetually as the ministrant to our faith and hope.

But if we accept this message, it carries certain implications.

Our own age has been schooled in such suffering that we should be competent to understand Christ's last week. The tragedy of the cross has been repeated. Before our eyes and as participants we have seen again the old contest between malignant cruelty and suffering love. Jesus was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem, but in our time the stage was set on a continent, flaming cities were a part of the lurid scenery, the sullen roar of artillery the orchestral music, the actors were nations, the theme liberty, the audience all humanity. But it was the same old contest as formerly—might against right, formalism against faith, malice against meekness, wrong against reverence, hatred against hope, Cæsar against Christ. We have been able to read the old story with modern experience. We have seen Pilates washing their hands and saying, "It wasn't my fault." We have

seen disciples who have betrayed and denied him and are repentant. Fatalists and fools unaware of what was going on dived for the prizes. There have been centurions moved by events who have cried out, "Surely . . . God!" There have been followers who have stood around in mute helplessness or quaking fear. The mother-heart of our time has again been pierced by a sword, while there are Marys lamenting for lost loved ones—"I know not where they have laid him!"

But for us as in the olden time a fatal Friday is followed by Easter, the black tragedy followed by the white glory of a new triumph. The world emerges from the suffering and cruelty of recent years to learn anew that its hope, its safety and its peace are all involved in the Easter message. If we have this hope in us we will purify ourselves, as John suggested. There is a law of the resurrection we must learn. "If we then be risen in Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth." This alone will bring that good will among men on which peace amid

groups or nations can be permanently built. This pleasure-mad and mammon-worshipping age needs nothing so much as spiritual-mindedness. We must discover how to make the joyous, victorious, potent fact of Easter morning a continuous experience in the life of to-day. The event must be translated into an activity.

When we read the Scriptures we find that the word "death" is not only used to mean the dissolution of the physical, but also to denote the debasement of the spiritual. "Lazarus is dead" is a use of this idea in its physical sense. But when we are told "to be carnally minded is death," and we may be "dead in trespasses and sins" we know it refers to the condition of the soul.

Likewise there is a double meaning and use of the resurrection thought. We are familiar with it as it deals with life after death. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." But we may have resurrection now. Christ means to call the soul from its spiritual death even

here. We grasp the lower thought of the resurrection, but miss the higher. We are like Martha, who said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." But Jesus would supersede this idea with the law of his transforming power in human life and conduct, and carry us to a nobler conception of his mission. He speaks in the present tense. He offers a continuous Easter. "I am the resurrection and the life. . . . Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Paul understood it. "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2. 5-6). This is what the early church meant by frequent reference to the "power of his resurrection." They felt it in their lives.

What transformations such a conception would work! In our distress and dismay and depression there is the promise of immediate relief through the power and comfort of God. The solvent for industrial ills and international complications is here.

If faith but take hold of this truth, we may indeed have a continuous Easter. Each morning we may feel the rapture of eternal life. Each day may be made glorious with spiritual power.

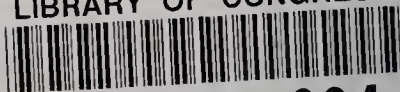
Then—"seek those things which are above." In all our choices there is a lower and a higher realm. Our work may be a selfish struggle for personal gain or a thing of service and stewardship. Which shall it be? Seek that which is above. Our thoughts may be base and sordid or they may wing their flight to the mountain peaks of lofty theme and sentiment. Our amusements may be cheap and tawdry and at the expense of others or wholesome and happy, making all life a delicious and radiant experience. Our friendships may be common or ennobling. The books we read may drag a slimy trail across the mind or be as a south wind and sun in their nurture of the soul. Even in religion we choose between that which is formal and that which is vital. Choices each day—and always the opportunity of selecting the thing which is above. Will we live on the plain or plateau? Will we dwell on the moor or the mountain? Shall we be content with the dead level of

drudgery and despair or climb to the heights of noble aim and action?

Every impulse to right living, every prompting to noble conduct, every call of conscience, every glowing ideal, every inspiration to be better, every desire to arise to the full stature of strong symmetrical character, all that pulls us upward with persuasive power, emanates from the Spirit of the living Christ. Every attempt to apply his teachings to business, to politics, to education, to society is evidence of his presence among men. "This is life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Seek him! Seek the things he is interested in! Seek to serve! Seek not with cold calculation and hesitant deliberation! Seek all that he offers with that eager expectancy which characterized the first Easter morning. Let this law of the resurrection be invoked to-day with an outrush of soul like the haste of Peter and John as they ran to the tomb at daybreak. Then the rapture of the first Easter will be carried into a continuous Easter. Then shall we experience a spiritual exultation full of joy and hope. Our chief concern will be the coming of the

Kingdom. We shall not look for it to break on us in some supernatural way, but labor for its triumph as the inevitable result of this divine fellowship and a noble consecration to the task Jesus has left us to perform.

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